



## McGREGOR W. SCOTT

*United States Attorney  
Eastern District of California*

## NEWS RELEASE

**Sacramento**  
501 I Street, Suite 10-100  
Sacramento, CA 95814  
Tel 916/554-2700  
TTY 916/554-2877

**Fresno**  
2500 Tulare Street, Suite 4401  
Fresno, CA 93721  
Tel 559/497-4000  
TTY 559/497-4500

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Contact: Karen Escobar  
559/497-4000

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### **BAKERSFIELD MEDICAL POT DISPENSARY OWNER PLEADS GUILTY**

FRESNO—United States Attorney McGregor W. Scott announced today that WILLIAM EUGENE CONNELLY, 50, of Bakersfield, pleaded guilty today to possessing marijuana with the intent to distribute. CONNELLY owns the Seven Seas Compassionate Care Center, a medical marijuana dispensary located at 6403 Seven Seas Avenue, #A, in Bakersfield.

The prosecution is the result of an investigation conducted by the DEA and the Department of Justice Organized Crime and Drug Enforcement Task Force (OCDETF). The OCDETF program was established in 1982 to conduct comprehensive, multilevel attacks on major drug trafficking and money laundering organizations.

In pleading guilty, CONNELLY admitted that on May 29, 2007, he possessed approximately 40 pounds of marijuana at his dispensary that he intended to distribute in violation of federal law. He also admitted that at that time, he intended to sell the dispensary to CRYSTAL CASTRO, 23, and JULIA QUIROZ, 39, both of Bakersfield, who assisted CONNELLY in the operation of the dispensary. QUIROZ and CASTRO entered a guilty plea to possessing marijuana with the intent to distribute from the Seven Seas dispensary.

According to Assistant United States Attorney Karen A. Escobar, who prosecuted the case, the charges stemmed from a larger investigation of FIDEL CASTRO, the leader of a methamphetamine and cocaine ring that ultimately distributed drugs to street-level Norteño gang members engaged in drug

trafficking and violent crime in the Stockton, California area. CASTRO and QUIROZ are relatives of CASTRO. The investigation uncovered FIDEL CASTRO's link to the Seven Seas marijuana dispensary, and the DEA seized approximately 188 marijuana plants and approximately one pound of processed marijuana from CONNELLY's marijuana dispensary. Eight individuals, including FIDEL CASTRO, were indicted in the conspiracy. CONNELLY, QUIROZ, and CRYSTAL CASTRO were not implicated in the methamphetamine and cocaine trafficking aspect of the conspiracy.

CONNELLY, QUIROZ, and CRYSTAL CASTRO face a maximum sentence of 20 years in prison, a fine of \$1 million, and a term of supervised release for at least three years. The actual sentence, however, will be determined at the discretion of the court after consideration of the Federal Sentencing Guidelines, which take into account a number of variables and any applicable statutory sentencing factors. CONNELLY and QUIROZ will be sentenced on May 19, 2008 at 9:00 a.m. before U.S. District Judge Anthony W. Ishii. CRYSTAL CASTRO is scheduled for sentencing on April 21, 2008.

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